

CUSTOMER CONNECTION

Energy news for our customers • Vol. 17 No. 2 • March 2010

Stop air leaks, stay comfortable Confront the energy loss culprits in your home

In the dead of winter even the most experienced northern dwellers can find themselves asking why a persistent chill exists in their homes.

Truth is, even with the thermostat set for comfort, factors such as air leaks and insufficient insulation allow cold air to sneak into your home and warm air to seep out. Older homes, in particular, tend to suffer high energy loss due to cold air infiltrating through windows, doors, and the rim joists at the top of the basement walls. Air leaking into unfinished attic spaces also allows warm air to escape through the attic.

Keep comfort where it belongs

You often can address the primary home energy loss culprits through low-cost measures. Applying caulking, weather stripping, and insulation to specific areas including the attic access, plumbing vents, wiring entrances, windows, and doors all help to maintain comfort.

Flues such as those associated with the water heater or furnace and fireplace chimneys also are sources to check for air loss. Take care when sealing leaks and adding insulation around these areas in attic spaces. Codes usually require specific clearances from combustible materials to help avoid fire hazards.

“We used to think that poor insulation was the most problematic,” said Jon Fabre, senior program design specialist at Otter Tail Power Company. “New consensus is that air leaks are just as challenging.” As you tighten your home against air leaks, however, it’s important to understand the need for adequate ventilation to maintain safety and avoid moisture problems. That’s why we recommend that you work with a qualified insulation contractor. Contractors can assess insulation needs and help ensure that completed work qualifies for federal insulation rebates.

Make the right decisions for your home

As your qualified contractor walks you through the decision-making process, you’ll likely hear the term R-Value. The higher the R-Value of a material, the greater its insulating properties and the slower heat flows through it.

Be safe: Call 811 before you dig

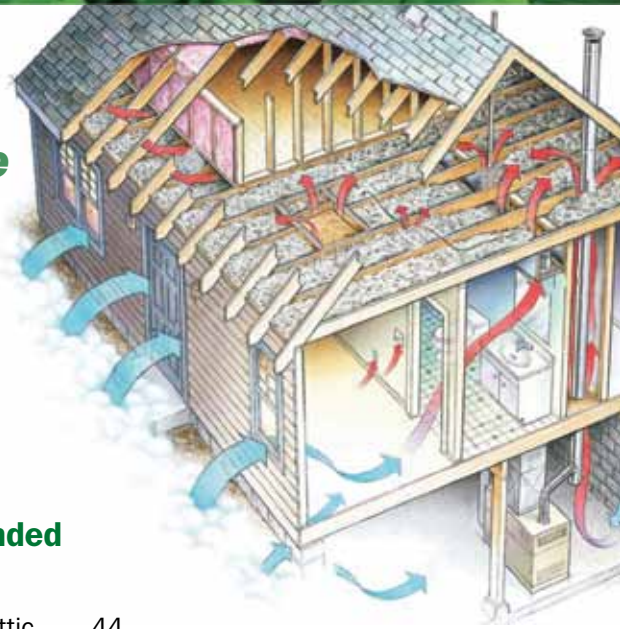
Dialing three numbers is all it takes to find out if it’s safe to dig in your yard. The new federally mandated national 811 Call Before You Dig number was created to prevent you from unintentionally hitting underground utility lines while working on digging projects.

Every state has different rules and regulations governing digging, but all projects—even planting trees or shrubs—require a call. Dialing 811 will connect you to the appropriate One Call center, or you can contact your state’s One Call center directly.

North Dakota: 800-795-0555 or www.ndonecall.com

South Dakota: 800-781-7474 or www.onecall.sd.gov

Minnesota: 800-252-1166 or www.gopherstateonecall.org



Recommended R-Value

Ceilings and attic	44
Walls	11 (2 x 4 construction) 19 (2 x 6 construction)
Knee walls	11 to 19
Basement walls	10 to 20

To learn more about insulating your home check out the *Do-it-yourself guide to sealing and insulating with Energy Star®* booklet available on our web site at www.otpco.com or call our **Idea Center** at **800-493-3299** to request your free copy.

Take advantage of rebates

As part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, qualifying homeowners may be eligible for a tax rebate of 30 percent of the cost of insulation, up to \$1,500. Rebates also are available for energy-efficient windows, doors, roofing improvements, and more.

You can save money without spending money as well. Otter Tail Power Company’s *Homeowners’ guide to energy savings* is a great place to start. This guide offers no-cost and low-cost energy-saving tips. Visit www.otpco.com or call our **Idea Center** at **800-493-3299** for your free copy.

The last thing you want is for energy (and money) to leak out of your home! With state and federal incentives, now is the perfect time to insulate and weatherize.

Resources:

www.otpco.com

www.energysavers.gov

www.state.mn.us

www.sd.gov

www.nd.gov

www.energystar.gov

International Music Camp scholarships available

Otter Tail Power Company has contributed 25 \$100 scholarships to the International Music Camp at the International Peace Garden on the border of North Dakota and Manitoba. The scholarships are for campers from our service area for the 2010 season.

Scholarships will be awarded on a first-come, first-served basis. To be eligible, a camper’s family must be an Otter Tail Power Company customer. For more information, contact the International Music Camp at 701-838-8472.

Doing our best to prevent the worst

Pandemic planning

In the face of the H1N1 influenza scare, many may have forgotten about the global concern surrounding the avian flu a few years ago. Not the Safety Services people at Otter Tail Power Company.

International scare drives plan development

In August 2007 our company produced a pandemic preparedness plan in response to worldwide concerns about "bird" flu. Among other elements, the plan outlines what constitutes a pandemic and what our company can do to help ensure that electricity continues to flow without interruption to our customers. When H1N1 influenza hit, our company took comfort in knowing that we are prepared.

"As a public utility we respond to circumstances and events such as natural disasters on a fairly regular basis," says Ryan Smith, Manager of Safety Services for Otter Tail Power Company. "Pandemic planning is much like planning for blizzards, floods, and tornadoes. Thankfully, we're seldom hit in our entire service area at one time."

Experts share knowledge and experience

Organizations such as the Minnesota Safety Council, North Dakota Department of Health, and Edison Electric Institute facilitate pandemic planning sessions throughout our service area. In developing our overall pandemic preparedness plan, we took information from these sessions as well as from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This information helped us recommend specific measures to help prevent the spread of influenza.

"We are following the advice from the CDC and sharing this information with our employees," said Smith. "Frequent hand washing, cough/sneeze etiquette, proper nutrition, and staying home if you're sick are some of the messages we use."

Smith adds that most of our Customer Service Centers and electric generating plants have hosted healthcare experts at monthly employee meetings and that our company offers a related video to all employees as a resource.

Ongoing efforts help ensure reliable service

Our employees are critical in providing reliable service to our customers so it's important that we help them stay healthy. And even the smallest efforts go a long way. "We have hand sanitizers in all Customer Service Centers and high-traffic areas and disinfecting wipes for commonly touched surfaces, including common work stations," said Smith. "Our building services employees have ramped up cleaning efforts for these areas as well."

Sometimes preventive measures simply aren't enough. "If we start to experience high absenteeism as a result of pandemic conditions our Human Resources and Safety Services Departments are prepared to respond with a mobile workforce and highly sophisticated telecommunications system to cover some functions from home, if necessary."

We want to assure you that your electric service provider is here for you even in the toughest of times. Otter Tail Power Company's pandemic preparedness plan is one way that our company is **ON for you.**

Rate changes anticipated

As you know, we recently requested a rate increase from the regulatory commissions in each of the three states we serve. While each commission approved a rate increase to help adjust for rising costs, our rates still aren't adequately recovering the costs associated with serving our customers. To maintain and upgrade our electric system, and finance these necessary investments, we plan to submit a new rate increase request in each of the states we serve by the end of the year. We haven't finalized our request timeline but anticipate that we'll submit a request in:

- Minnesota by April 2010.
- South Dakota by July 2010.
- North Dakota by the end of 2010.

In Minnesota and North Dakota interim rates, subject to refund, go into effect 60 days after we file our request. Customers won't see the final results of our request until the commissions make their decisions sometime in 2011. We'll continue to share information as we are able in future issues of *Customer Connection*.

For more information visit us online at www.otpco.com, click on *Electric rates*, and check out the brochure titled *What's driving your electricity costs?* Or call our **Customer Service Center** at **800-257-4044**.

Pine-to-prairie events

First Friday Art Walk

Bemidji Community Art Center
Bemidji, Minnesota, April 2
218-444-7570

Easter Egg Hunt

Fort Mandan, Washburn, North Dakota
April 3, 877-462-8535

Spring Wildflower Hike

Sica Hollow State Park
Lake City, South Dakota, May 15
605-448-5701

Customer tip

After you've cooked vegetables, allow any remaining liquid to cool and then freeze it in a pint-size freezer bag. Next time you make homemade soup, add your frozen liquid to the simmering soup. The frozen liquid will melt quickly, and you'll get additional nutrients.

Bonnie Wold, Bemidji, Minnesota

Customers' cookery

Ziploc omelet

2 eggs (large or extra large)

Chopped vegetables of your choice (onion, green pepper, mushroom, tomato, etc.)

Cubed meat of your choice (cooked ham, sausage, bacon, etc.)

Cheese of your choice

Salt, pepper, or other seasoning to taste

Crack eggs into a self-locking plastic bag. Seal the bag and shake it to mix the eggs. Add your favorite omelet ingredients. Reseal the bag and shake it to combine all the ingredients. Open the bag just enough to expel all the air and reseal the bag. Place the bag in boiling water for 13 minutes. Open the bag and the omelet will roll out easily. You typically can cook 6 to 8 omelets in a large kettle.

Joyce Lien, Clearbrook, Minnesota



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For upcoming issues, send your favorite recipe or household tip to shoff@otpco.com or to the above address.

If we use your recipe or tip, we'll send you a gift to thank you. Please indicate your preference for an LED night-light, deck of playing cards, or bean-stuffed toy otter.

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